

February 18, 2016

Testimony of
Sara and David Hadden
Appropriations Committee of
The Connecticut General Assembly

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee. Here we are together once again.

My name is Sara Hadden, and I am a former member of the board of directors of HARC.

And my name is David Hadden. I am a former chair of HARC's board, a member and former chair of the Connecticut Council on Developmental Services, and the current Vice Chair of Oak Hill's board of directors. Oak Hill and HARC are superb nonprofit providers to persons with developmental disabilities. These agencies are being asked to provide core functions of government with public funding well below the cost of these essential services. And that is wrong.

We are here tonight not in any official capacities, but instead to speak on behalf of our son, Jamie Hadden. He was born 35 years ago with cognitive abilities different from you and me. He never learned to speak or walk, and endured chronic physical discomfort. Jamie died last October, just before sunrise on a Sunday. Sara was on his left, and I on his right, all three of us fully supported by our Oak Hill family.

If Jamie could speak to you directly tonight, here is what he might say:

"What I would really like you to know, above all else, is that I am a person, just like you and everyone else in this building. I laugh and I cry. I get curious, and I get frightened. When I feel pain, I let my parents and caregivers know. Sometimes it takes too long to figure out what I need, and I get frustrated. You know how clueless parents can be.

"But mostly I know I am loved. When I first moved into my Oak Hill home, I was introduced with a long list of needs. We were a little tense. And then after a few weeks, we all let go and fell in love. Now I know each of my caregivers' voices, the sound of their footsteps in the hall, and their unique touch. I smile at their jokes, and they seem to get a real kick out of that. I trust them, and I feel safe."

What Sara and I respectfully urge you to consider is that:

--Underwriting the care required for Jamie and those like him is a core function of our government.

--Employee caregivers deserve a fair wage. It is right, and translates directly to proper care.

--Private providers afford the most cost-effective, community-based array of options to serve persons with developmental disabilities.

--With adequate funding, Oak Hill and others can handle beautifully the care of persons with highly complex needs.

--As we consider Medicaid and other systems change, we need to meaningfully engage private providers in the change process.

Jamie's obituary read that:

"He surprised countless skeptics touched by his vulnerability into an awareness that true beneficiaries of inclusion are not those allowed inside, but those who let go of the need to keep others out."

His life was telling us something very, very important.

Thank you.